The Kentucky Work Matters Task Force Lessons Learned

In June 2017, Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin signed an executive order creating the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force in response to the *Work Matters* report produced by The Council of State Governments, or CSG, and the National Conference of State Legislatures, or NCSL, in collaboration with the State Exchange on Employment & Disability, or SEED, in December 2016. The 23-member task force brought together key state departments and private-sector representatives, including interests from economics, family services, public safety, workforce development, and advocacy groups, to address barriers to employment and promote workforce inclusion among targeted constituencies. The task force developed policies and reviewed practices that make the workforce more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities, people with criminal records, foster children, people with substance abuse disorders, and disabled veterans. These underutilized populations are a key component in America’s ability to build a strong, inclusive workforce.

Promoting inclusive workforce policies requires coordination at all levels of government, with states having critical knowledge of economic and employment realities on the ground. We appreciate Gov. Bevin’s leadership on this issue and continue to encourage states to share their experience and insight.”

Jennifer Sheehy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy

THE EXECUTIVE ORDER

“NOW, THEREFORE, I, MATTHEW G. BEVIN, do hereby establish the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force to develop policies and review practices that make the workforce, in both the public and private sector, more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities, which will benefit the employee, the employer, and the economy as a whole.”

THE TARGET POPULATIONS

People with disabilities
Foster children
People with substance abuse disorders
People with criminal records
Disabled veterans
WHAT WORKED IN KENTUCKY

FIVE LESSONS

1. PROMOTE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

• Coordinating the goals, strategies and initiatives of multiple agencies is necessary for success. The diverse group of stakeholders needed for a collaborative workforce inclusion strategy often come to the table with different, and sometimes conflicting, missions and priorities. The Kentucky Work Matters Task Force successfully brought together every department of Kentucky state government that plays a role in workforce development along with members of the private sector. Bringing together all stakeholders allowed the task force to:
  • Inventory potential partners
  • Leverage existing relationships between cabinets and outside entities
  • Blend and braid funding to allow funds to be used more easily and creatively at the point of service and delivery
  • Have a comprehensive definition of success for the task force
  • Easily communicate across cabinets and agencies

2. PRIORITIZE COMPREHENSIVE DATA SYSTEMS IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

• Although data collection is often an afterthought, it is a key element to any successful workforce effort. Many workforce program planners focus on implementing an initiative and delay data collection or integration. However, delaying data collection complicates the gathering and analysis of information and makes the process of shaping an initiative more difficult. The Kentucky Work Matters Task Force prioritized data when developing policy recommendations for the report. Analyzing data as a starting point helped guide the task force to make better data-driven policy decisions. The task force received data from:
  • The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
  • Kentucky Center on Education and Workforce Statistics
  • Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet
  • Kentucky Council on Criminal Justice Reform
  • Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children

3. UTILIZE EXPERTISE THROUGH SUBCOMMITTEES

• In order to involve more subject matter experts in the development of policy recommendations, the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force formed a subcommittee to examine needs and perspectives of people with disabilities. The subcommittee brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from the disability community and allowed for a more focused and informed conversation. The additional work of this subcommittee assisted the task force in identifying unique needs of this population and developing the robust policy recommendations contained in the report.

• The subcommittee members not a part of the full task force included:
  • Becky Cabe, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Acting Director
  • Jason Cole, Kentucky Rehabilitation Association, President and Regional OVR Manager
  • Jeff Edwards, Department for Protection and Advocacy, Executive Director
  • Kathy Sheppard-Jones, University of Kentucky—Human Development Institute, Executive Director
  • Cora McNabb, Kentucky Office for the Blind, Acting Director
  • Katie Bentley, Kentucky Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, Policy Coordinator
  • Jeff White, Kentucky Behavioral Health Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, Quality Assurance Coordinator—Employment Service
  • Jennifer Hicks, Kentucky Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities, Program Administrator
  • Barbara Pugh, Kentucky Rehabilitation Association, Past President, Director of Kentucky Perkins Center
  • John Connelly, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, Director, Research and Grants
  • Lucy Heskins, Department for Protection and Advocacy, Staff Attorney
  • Larry Worth, The ViaQuest Foundation, Executive Director
  • Winston Bennett, Kentucky Apprenticeship Program, Director
  • Kristi Putnam, Kentucky HEALTH Team, Program Manager
4. INCORPORATE SITE VISITS IN THE WORK OF THE TASK FORCE

- Members of the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force toured the Kenton County Detention Center and learned about their nationally recognized substance abuse rehabilitation program, which has garnered attention in combating Kentucky’s addiction and incarceration issues. Discussions about data and policy options can be vague and theoretical. This firsthand experience—shaking hands with inmates, hearing their struggles, empathizing with their stories, and learning about their needs—had a profound impact on the task force. Developing policy is one thing, but connecting a face and a story with a policy change makes the work more meaningful for those involved as well as those benefiting from the change.

5. SOLICIT INPUT FROM THE TARGET POPULATIONS

- The Kentucky Work Matters Task Force made a very concerted effort to ensure that individuals from each target population had an opportunity to participate in task force meetings. The task force pursued people-first language and positive attitudes about these target populations, being inclusive and prioritizing their abilities, interests and needs. The task force sought to foster accurate portrayals of each population: presenting respectful, positive view of these individuals as active participants of society in typical social, work and home environments while simultaneously focusing attention on tough issues that affect quality of life, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities and discrimination. Members of the task force did not want to proceed in making policy recommendations without listening to the people who need their perspectives heard the most.

ADDITIONAL STATE TASK FORCE EFFORTS

- A similar model to the Kentucky Work Matters Task Force is being explored by other states, including Alaska, Massachusetts, Oregon and Tennessee. For example, Rep. Gene Whisnant sponsored HB2965, which “establishes an Oregon Task Force on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities based on the National Task Force on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities.” In Tennessee, the Ad Hoc Committee on Disability Services heard testimony from members of the Kentucky Work Matters Task force on details about establishing a similar task force.

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THE KENTUCKY WORK MATTERS TASK FORCE PROCESS AND RESULTS

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

- Adam Meier, deputy chief of staff for Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin
- Secretary Scott Brinkman, Executive Cabinet
- Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson, Cabinet for Health and Family Services
- Secretary John Tilley, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet
- Secretary Derrick Ramsey, Labor Cabinet
- Secretary Hal Heiner, Education and Workforce Development Cabinet
- Secretary Tom Stephens, Personnel Cabinet
- Secretary Greg Thomas, Transportation Cabinet
- Vivek Sarin, Cabinet for Economic Development executive officer
- Deputy Commissioner Bryan Hubbard, Division of Income Support
- Buddy Hoskinson, Department for Aging and Independent Living
- Commissioner Beth Kuhn, Department of Workforce Investment
- Commissioner Stephen Pruitt, Department of Education
- President Bob King, Council on Postsecondary Education
- Sen. John Schickel
- Sen. Robin Webb
- Rep. Jim DeCesare
- Rep. Arnold Simpson
- Katie Shepherd, Kentucky Supreme Court designee
- Mike Michalak, Little Caesars Pizza
- Katie Wolf Whaley, Supported Employment Training Project, Human Development Institute
- Beth Davisson, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Tim McGurk, Kroger
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

8.1% OF KENTUCKIANS ARE ON SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY INSURANCE
(206,175 BENEFICIARIES)

FLOYD • 4,055 PEOPLE ON SSDI
10.93% of total population (37,110)

PIKE • 6,385 PEOPLE ON SSDI
10.54% of total population (60,555)

LESLIE • 1,075 PEOPLE ON SSDI
10.20% of total population (10,538)

HARLAN • 2,615 PEOPLE ON SSDI
9.63% of total population (27,168)

MARTIN • 1,120 PEOPLE ON SSDI
9.33% of total population (12,002)

LETCHER • 2,125 PEOPLE ON SSDI
9.33% of total population (22,773)

BREATHITT • 1,225 PEOPLE ON SSDI
9.22% of total population (13,284)

WOLFE • 655 PEOPLE ON SSDI
9.15% of total population (7,159)

KNOTT • 1,390 PEOPLE ON SSDI
8.94% of total population (15,544)

INCARCERATION
More than 35,000 Kentuckians are incarcerated in a state correctional facility or county jail, taking them out of the available workforce.

DISABILITY
More than 206,000 Kentuckians are receiving some form of Social Security disability payments—meaning they have been judged to be unable to perform any significant work. Approximately one-third of Kentuckians found disabled have a mental disorder, while another third have some form of muscle disease (such as arthritis or muscular dystrophy).

SUBSTANCE ABUSE
Approximately 300,000 Kentuckians are addicted to or have serious problems with alcohol. Twenty percent (4,616) of the inmates in state correctional institutions were convicted of a drug-related crime, and Kentucky has one of the nation’s highest rates of deaths due to drug overdoses as well as a high opioid prescription rate.

SSDI COSTS $256,074,000 IN TOTAL MONTHLY BENEFITS.
AVERAGE MONTHLY AMOUNT PER BENEFICIARY: $1,139.30
EXAMPLES OF FINAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

People with disabilities

- State as model employer
  - Develop an overall strategic plan for Kentucky and each state agency, including hiring goals, surveys and progress reports.
  - Partner with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of the Blind to create paths to certification for individuals with disabilities.

- Transportation
  - Adopt policies and regulations that prioritize transportation options that are reliable and accessible as well as alternative strategies that address and mitigate challenges for people with disabilities (e.g. using emerging technologies such as autonomous vehicles, rideshares, partnering with taxi companies and implementing transportation coordination councils.)

- Accessible information and communication technology
  - Create procurement policies that ensure information and communication technology, or ICT, acquired by state and local governments that are fully accessible to and usable by people with disabilities and compatible with assistive technology devices.
  - Incentivize employers to level the playing field for applicants and employees with disabilities by the adoption of accessible ICT and supporting the use of assistive technology.

- Job retention and return to work
  - Adopt stay at work/return to work programs in private and public sectors to facilitate the ongoing employment of individuals who experience injuries or illness that may impact their ability to work.

- Supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship
  - Explore opportunities to facilitate and support disability-owned businesses through existing procurement and contracting systems.
  - Explore tax and financial incentives to support start-up and/or growth of disability-owned businesses (e.g. low-interest revolving loans, grants, mentoring, investors).

People with criminal records

- Participate in and promote the federal bonding program that provides no cost fidelity bonds for returning citizens and other hard-to-place job applicants who face barriers to employment.
- Continue to improve training programs available to those who are incarcerated by expanding partnerships with private-sector employers such as Justice to Journeymen.
- Provide soft-skill development programs to promote an individual’s success in the workplace.
- Develop a transitional employment program utilizing best practices from existing programs in other states.
• Provide supports for individuals with disabilities, including individuals with serious mental health issues, learning disabilities, substance use disorders, and logistical challenges post-incarceration, such as housing, clothing, identification, transportation, child care, etc.

**People with substance abuse disorders**

• Develop transitional employment program utilizing best practices from existing programs in other states.

• Create peer-driven programs to identify partners who are willing to hire those in recovery and connect with employers.

• Develop model employer assistance program based on best practices and offered as a part of business services to employers willing to establish it in their own businesses.

• Adopt recovery peer support credential training programs in workforce areas with high concentrations of substance abuse recovery centers.

• Create a residential recovery/workforce center that could be used for a diversion program for those charged with a drug related offense (or re-entry program for those transitioning out of incarceration).

**Foster Youth**

• Revise state statute to exempt foster youth who are enrolled in an adult education program and pursuing their high school equivalency from compulsory school attendance.

• Revise state statute to expand tuition waiver eligibility for students who fit the criteria and wish to extend their education to graduate school.

• Expand the number of private-sector partners involved in the fostering success program.

• As post-secondary educational supports for foster youth continue to be developed and expanded, opportunities for peer support, mentoring, and case management should be made available as well.

• Establish a foster youth bill of rights by statute.

**Veterans**

• Encourage institutions to maintain publicly accessible database of course equivalencies for military training and military occupations that have been evaluated.

• Provide academic advisors and admissions counselors with the materials and professional expertise to meet the unique needs of military students attempting to transfer their military experience.

• Amend state statute to require licensing boards to create military reciprocity through the administrative regulation system and/or executive order.

• Establish a clearinghouse or “one stop shop” for all military-related services provided for and to active military, military spouses and veterans.

• Increase employer incentives for hiring service members, military spouses, and veterans.

There is dignity that comes from work, and there is a sense of satisfaction and respect—for oneself and for others—that comes from being an engaged part of the community, and there’s nothing more integral than the dignity associated with being part of the fabric of that community through work. Kentucky’s economy can benefit from the talents of every Kentuckian in order to realize our vision for growth.”

 Gov. Matt Bevin, Kentucky